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ABSTRACT

A pilot survey, administered in 1972, was designed to assess a rough cross section of attitudes toward birth control in both black and white neighborhoods. A survey of 41 male and 39 female white residents of Decatur, Georgia, was conducted primarily to get an indication of how attitudes held by whites relate to feelings about family planning programs for black people. Another objective was to compare the attitudes of black people and white people toward government, family planning, and new, radical birth control proposals. An 87-item interview was administered to all of the respondents by one white female interviewer. Interviews with 41 male and 40 female black residents were conducted by 11 black interviewers. Several questions appeared on both the white and black survey questionnaires, making comparisons possible. The statement that "whites practice birth control more often than blacks" was endorsed by 69 percent of the black sample and by 85 percent of the white sample. Agreement with the view that "poverty programs are a way of keeping poor people quiet" was expressed by 64 percent of males, regardless of race and by 41 percent of black and 27 percent of white females. The interview was revised based on the results of the pilot survey, additional review of printed literature related to opposition to family planning in the black community, and the selection of several appropriate questions used by other investigators. (Author/JM)

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Attitudes Toward Family Planning Programs for the Black Community

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An interview questionnaire survey of 80 white and 81 black people explored attitudes toward birth control, government, and racial issues, and studied other opinions related to family planning programs for the black community.

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A review of the literature on attitudes toward family planning programs for the black community included magazines and newspapers with widespread black readership, as well as professional publications (Rosenman, 1973). Additionally, the viewpoints of black political leaders, black professionals, and administrators of family planning programs were sought in order to acquire a wider range of educated opinions. The findings were used to develop a pilot survey, administered in 1972, designed to assess a rough cross section of attitudes toward birth control in both black and white neighborhoods.

Survey in the White Community:

A survey of 41 male and 39 female white residents of Decatur, Georgia, was conducted primarily to get an indication of how attitudes held by whites relate to feelings about family planning programs for black people. Another objective was to compare the attitudes of black people and white people toward government, family planning, and new, radical birth control proposals.

An 87-item interview was administered to all of the respondents by one white female interviewer. The sample was drawn from a middle class white population residing in Decatur, Georgia. Median family income was about $12,000. Seventy-nine percent of these individuals were born in the south, and 83% had not completed college.

Most respondents (81%) did not see the racial problem as the major problem facing this country. However, 85% agreed that busing should be stopped immediately, and half of the men and a third of the women would move if their neighborhood were to become more than 50% black. Although 80% of the sample thought that the U. S. system of government is the best in the world, 27% of the women and 64% of the men believe that poverty programs are a way of keeping poor people quiet.

Turning to attitudes toward family planning, most respondents (70%) felt that there was no population problem in the United States. However, there was strong endorsement of family

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planning programs. Ninety percent of the respondents agreed that couples applying for a marriage license should be given birth control information and 75% favored free, publicly-financed birth control assistance. But opinion was equally divided on making birth control information available to high school students. An unexpected finding was that 85% of the respondents endorsed the idea of an extra tax for individuals who had more than three children. When considering the relatively conservative attitude in this community, the enthusiastic response to family planning was greater than anticipated.

Relationships between attitudes toward family planning and those related to racial issues appear to be complex. Most respondents (85%) thought that white people practice birth control more than black people. But only (15%) favored limiting black families to two children. Twenty-five percent felt that the government should spend a great deal of money for programs that would limit the size of black families. Only 30% agreed that family planning clinics in black neighborhoods should be run by blacks. Twelve percent of women and 33% of men perceived an increase in the crime rate unless black family size is reduced.

Attitudes toward welfare mothers were especially negative. Twenty-two percent of the women and 36% of the men felt that "welfare mothers" should be sterilized (although nothing was mentioned in the question about how many children they had or whether they were legitimate). There was 90% agreement with the statement that "Welfare payments should not be given to women with more than three children." Thirty-eight percent of the respondents felt that women with more than two illegitimate children should undergo compulsory sterilization.

The inter-correlations of the attitudinal and demographic variables did not reveal any unexpected results. People voting for more liberal political candidates were more liberal on civil rights issues, had more trust in government, were younger, and were opposed to any of the measures which could be used to reduce the black population in a compulsory way. The current survey lends some credence to the attitude held by black people that racism is prevalent, and that family planning programs for black people might, to some extent, be motivated by white racism.

Survey in the Black Community:

Interviews with 41 male and 40 female black residents of Decatur, Georgia, were conducted by 11 black interviewers. Median yearly income for the sample was about $7,600. Education at the high school graduation level or beyond was attained by 53% of the females and 49% of the males. Median age was 28 for females and 30 for males.

Several questions appeared on both the white and black survey questionnaires, making comparisons possible. The statement "Whites practice birth control more often than blacks," was endorsed by 69% of the black sample and by 85% of the white sample. Agreement with, "Poverty programs are a way of keeping poor people quiet," was expressed by 64% of males, irrespective of race, and by 41% of black and 27% of white females. Items which related more to "the system" of government elicited greater racial differences. Eighty percent of the white and 46% of the black respondents agreed with, "The system in the U.S. is probably the best in the world and is really doing the best for most of us." "Most politicians are honest." was endorsed by 40% of the white sample, but only by 15% of the black sample.

At the end of the interview form used in the black community, there were six proposals designed to somewhat alleviate various population related problems. The one which elicited the most vehement opposition was "People should pay extra income tax if they have more than three children." Only 5% of the black respondents agreed with this proposal. In sharp contrast, there was 85% agreement for our white sample.

After surveys in Hartford, Philadelphia, and Charlotte, Darity and Turner (1972) concluded that a large percentage of their respondents consider the motives for family planning programs in the black community to be genocidal. Several of the Darity and Turner questionnaire items were used in our Atlanta pilot survey. In comparing results, the percentages for their Charlotte sample will be given in parentheses. Agreement with, "Birth control programs are a plot to eliminate blacks." was expressed by 21% of our male sample (D & T 28%) and by 3% of our female sample (D & T 20%). The more moderate statement that "The real aim of birth control programs is to reduce the number of low income people" was agreed with by 69% of our sample (D & T 62%). Forty-five percent of our respondents (D & T 57%) agreed with, "As blacks become more militant, there will be an effort to reduce the black population."

Closely related to the controversy surrounding sex education is the issue of providing younger people with contraceptive knowledge. In our pilot survey, agreement with the statement, "Birth control methods should be made available to high school students," was expressed by 90% of the males and 85% of the females. This favorable attitude toward the distribution of family planning information is especially important when taking the low level of existing knowledge into account. There is still much ignorance in an area as basic as simple reproductive physiology. In reply to the questions "Are there certain times of the month when a woman is more likely to become pregnant?" and "If yes, what time of the month is this?", the percentage of responses were distributed as follows:

	Male	Female
1. Before and after period...	27%	23%
2. Before period.....	5%	15%
3. After period.....	14%	5%
4. Mid-cycle.....	5%	36%
5. During period.....	0%	0%
6. Don't Know.....	41%	18%
7. Other.....	8%	3%

Thus, only 5% of the males and 36% of the females had even a vague understanding of the ovulatory cycle.

Local community control of birth control clinics has been viewed as a way of minimizing fears of genocidal motives underlying family planning programs. A much more controversial idea is that only black people should be allowed to staff clinics in black communities. In a study on attitudes of black people toward birth control, Bradshaw (1972) found that 52% of the opinion leaders and 21% of the health workers agreed with the statement, "Birth control clinics in black neighborhoods should be operated by blacks." In our study, this item was endorsed by 65% of the respondents. An experiential factor might account for the above differences. In view of the fact that the health workers were employed by an agency which was staffed and directed by black individuals, they might have perceived that more than racial staffing patterns are necessary for solving service delivery problems. At the other extreme, as Buckhout (1972) states, "... an externally financed crusade staffed largely by white professionals can provoke a boomerang reaction from the people in the community it tries to help.

In an effort to determine whether our sample was familiar with the positions toward family planning expressed by black groups and well known black people, we asked our respondents to categorize the positions as either for, against or neutral. The results are given below:

	SCLC		BLACK PANTHERS		DICK GREGORY		ANDREW YOUNG	
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
For	22	10	13	1	15	4	23	6
Against.....	0	1	6	4	4	8	3	1
Neutral.....	1	3	7	4	3	2	2	8
Don't Know....	14	24	12	30	15	24	10	22

	MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.		ELIJAH MUHAMMAD		MARK PHILLIPS	
	M	F	M	F	M	F
For.....	25	10	9	1	4	0
Against.....	0	1	5	6	3	1
Neutral.....	2	8	11	5	7	1
Don't Know....	10	21	12	27	22	35

As expected, there was familiarity with the positions of those who favored family planning (SCLC, Andrew Young, and Martin Luther King, Jr.). Surprisingly, despite the outspoken opposition to family planning programs voiced by the Black Panthers, Dick Gregory, and Elijah Muhammad, the majority of our male respondents who gave a for or against response, attributed a favorable attitude to each of them. The name of Mark Phillips was simply made up to see how many people would attempt to guess at an answer which they did not know.

The interview was revised based on the results of the pilot survey, additional review of printed literature related to opposition to family planning in the black community, and the selection of several appropriate questions from recent interview schedules used by other investigators. The revised 193 item interview questionnaire (Rosenman, 1976) is designed for surveying attitudes toward family planning in the black community.

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